

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 /065 W

-----037152 112117Z /72

R 111240Z OCT 77

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4219

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NI

SUBJECT: 'INDISCIPLINE' IN NIGERIA: FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR THE ASSEMBLY

?

REF: (A) KADUNA 959, (B) LAGOS 10677, (C) LAGOS A-84

SUMMARY: OBASANJO'S JAI SPEECH HAS KICKED OFF A
GENERAL PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON THE THEME OF 'INDISCIPLINE'
IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY. IN FOSTERING THE DISCUSSION AT
THIS TIME, THE FMG MAY WISH TO SET THE BACKGROUND FOR
CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DISCUSSION. END SUMMARY.

1. FMG CHIEF OF STATE OBASANJO'S SEPTEMBER 12 JAJI SPEECH
ON THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY HAS SET OFF WIDE

PREAD AND CONTINUING PRESS AND PUBLIC COMMENT.

2. WHILE AGREEING WITH OBASANJO'S DIAGNOSIS OF NIGERIA'S
ILLS AND HIS CALL TO BUILD A 'DISCIPLINED, FAIR, JUST
AND HUMANE AFRICAN SOCIETY,' MOST PRESS COMMENTARY HAS
TENDED TO BE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A
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TRANSFORMATION. TYPICAL OF THESE COMMENTS WAS LIVINNS
OKEREAFOR'S ASSESSMENT IN THE SEPTEMBER 23 DAILY TIMES IN
WHICH HE DESCRIBED THE JAJI SPEECH AS THE 'MOST INCISIVE
ANALYSIS OF THE PARALYSIS OF THE BODY POLITIC BY A MAN
WHO PRESIDES OVER THAT BODY.' NOTING OBASANJO'S DESCRIPTION
OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY AS CORRUPT INHUMANE, INDISCIPLINED,
LAWLESS, OSTENTATIOUS, DESTRUCTIVE, UNEQUAL BUT POTENTIALLY

GREAT, OKEREAFOR FOUND IT UNLIKELY THAT THIS CALL TO GREATNESS WOULD HAVE MUCH EFFECT ON THE HABITS OF THE AVERAGE NIGERIAN, JMBECAUSE THE EARS OF THE AVERAGE NIGERIAN OF TODAY ARE LIKE STEEL SIEVES.' IRONICALLY IN PRAISE OF THE WEST, HE NOTED, 'WE CRAVE FOR THE FREEDOMS ENJOYED BY CIVILIZED SOCIETIES AND FSHION OUR LAWS TO UPHOLD SUCH FREEDOMS, WHEN AS A MATTER OF COMMON KNOWLEDGE, WE HAVE NOT BEGUN TO CULTIVATE THE HABITS OF A CIVILIZED SOCIETY.' IN CONCLUSION, OKEREAFOR LAMELY CALLED FOR A STRENGTHENING OF THE POLICE FORCE.

3. CONCERNTRATING ON THE THEME, THE DAILY TIMES OF SETBTEMBER 20 COMMENTED 'WE MUST CONCLUDE THAT INDISCIPLINE IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE DERIVES FROM SOME CONDITION OTHER THAN THE CHAOTIC CAPITALISTIC SYSTEM WHICH OBTAINS IN THE NATION TODEP.' RATHER, IT ' COMES FROM OUR FAILURE SO FAR TO WILLINGLY AND VIGOROUSLY EMBRACE THE IDEA OF A NIGERIAN NATIONHOOD. ' GOING FURTHER, THE SUNDAY TIMES OF SEPTEMBER 18 NOTED THAT THE MILITARY ITSELF MUST SET AN EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLINE FOR THE OTHER PARTS SOCIETY TO EMULATE.

4. PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE INDISCIPLINE THEME WAS FOCUSED ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AFTER GEN. OBASANJO'S WELL-PUBLICIZED CAVING OF A DIRTY, DISORDERLY SCHOOLBOY ON SEPTEMBER 25 AND THE SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT SOLDIERS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WOULD BE POSTED IN SCHOOLS TO MAINTAIN ORDER. THE DAILY TIMES DISAGREED WITH THE LATTER ACTION WHILE THE NIGERIAN OBSERVER TERMED IT 'DISTURBING.' MOST PRESS

COMMENT STRESSED THE ROLE THAT THE TEACHER MUST AND SHOULD PLAY.

5. THE CENTER OF ATTENTION THEN MOVED TO THE BUREAUCRACY AFTER GEN OBASANJO'S 'SURPRISE' VIST ON OCTOBER 4 TO THE NEW IKOYI FEDERAL SCRETARIAT WHERE HE FOUND EMPTY OFFICES A HALF HOUR BEFORE THE OFFICIAL CLOSING TIME. SECRETARY TO THE FMG ANSUHEAD OF SERDUCE CIROMA ASSURED THE GENERAL THAT DISCIPLINARY MEASURES WOULD BE INSTITUTED TO COUNTER SUCH BEHAVIOR.

6. COMMENT: OBASANJO'S SPEECH STRUCK US AS A WELL PUT TOGETHER MELANGE OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, SOCRATIC THOUGHT, AND THE FRUSTRATIONS OF A MILITARY MAN ATTEMPTING TO GOVERN THIS COUNTRY. HOWEVER, IT WAS PROBABLY INTENDED TO BE A SERIOUS STATEMENT OF WHAT THIS GOVERNMENT THINKS AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS SUCH.

7. THE THEME OF INDISCIPLINE IS DIFFUSED AND CAN BE INTERPRETED IN VARIOUS WAYS. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME SPECTATORS HERE DETECTED IN OBASANJO'S REMARKS THE NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL IDEOLOGY. ALONG THAT LINE. MVENDAGA JIBO COMPLAINED IN THE SUNDAY TIMES 'THAT NONE OF OUR GOVERNMENTS HAD EVER FELT SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATED TO EMBARK ON A SYSTEMATIC EDUCATION OF THE NIGERIAN MASSES. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING SINCE WE HAVE BEEN RULED BY REGIMES WHICH HAVE REFRAINED FROM MAKING NECESSARY IDEOLOGICAL DECISIONS.' SIMILARLY, THE DAILY TIMES OBSERVED, 'WE NEED NOT, IN THIS REGARD, BE UNDULY SUSPICIOUS OF IDEOLOGIES. A NATIONAL IDEOLOGY IS THE SUM TOTAL OF THE ASPIRATIONS OF ANY SOCIETY.'

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8. IN THIS AND IN OTHER WAYS, THE JAJI SPEECH SHOULD PROVIDE GRIST FOR THE CONSTITUTENT ASSEMBLY AS IT ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE THE OUTLINES OF NIGERIA'S FUTURE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT. THAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE REASON THE FMG RAISED THE TOPIC AND FOSTERED THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION IN THE FIRST PLACE. IN THAT SENSE, JAJI MAY BE BOTH A GUIDE AND A WARNING TO THE ASSEMBLY. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SPEECHES, SOCIAL PROBLEMS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 11-Oct-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LAGOS11626
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770370-0779
Format: TEL
From: LAGOS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771075/aaaacslr.tel
Line Count: 145
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a85b9e32-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 KADUNA 959, 77 LAGOS 10677, 77 LAGOS A-84
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 969668
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: 'INDISCIPLINE' IN NIGERIA: FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR THE ASSEMBLY ?
TAGS: PINT, NI, (OBASANJO, OLUSEGUN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a85b9e32-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009